

Yorùbá Worldview on Family Institution Encapsulated in D.O. Fágúnwà's Novels

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ABSTRACT: A distinctive characteristic of D.O Fágúnwà's novels is the manner in which they invoke the framework of ideas and beliefs through which the Yorùbá interpret the world. Previous works on D.O. Fágúnwà's novels dealt with themes, styles, characterization and the use of symbols and language with little reference to the Yorùbá worldview about man, nature and the society. The paper therefore examined Yorùbá worldview on family institution as encapsulated in D.O Fágúnwà's novels in order to expose the influence of Yorùbá philosophy on his work, which has not been much discussed in literature. The paper adopted textual analyses of data. The five novels of Fágúnwà, namely: Ògbójú Ọdẹ nínú Igbó írúnmọlẹ̀, Igbó Olódùmarè, Ìrèké Oníbùdó, Ìrínkèrindò nínú Igbó Elégbèje and Àdìtú Olódùmarè, consitute the primary sources of data, while library and archival materials were used as secondary data to complement the texts. Explorations were made into a wide scope of general philosophy as a guide to unveiling the relationship between the philosophical impressions in the novels and the conventional philosophical concepts. The paper established the interrelationship between literature and philosophy. It revealed the Yorùbá worldview as regards the family institution portrayed in

Fágúnwà's presentations of family settings, kinship, and co-wife rivalry. The paper concludes that the Yorùbá worldview which Fágúnwà revealed in his novels is desirable and relevant to all human races, irrespective of the epochs, countries or cultures. Also, the literary presentation in the novels revealed Fágúnwà's knowledge of the Yorùbá culture, philosophy and tradition which should be distilled and projected in the modern day civic education.

KEYWORDS: Yorùbá worldview, Yorùbá family, philosophy and literature, worldview idealism, D.O Fágúnwà's novels

1. Introduction

Literature reflects the society. It documents the lifestyle, belief system, political and economic activities of the society at a given point in time. Agyekum (2007) describes literature as a databank for the storage of language and culture as well as embodiment of socio-political, economic, religious and philosophical aspects of a people's way of life. This implies that analysis and interpretation of literary works offers insights into a crucial value of language apart from being a medium of communication. Fictional presentation in literature is made up of story, non-natural, and unreal products of the human imagination devoid of the 'truth' or fact (Agyekum 2007). It is an imaginative work made up of sequence of events.

Fáṣèkẹ́ (1998) claims that the traditional Yorùbá, like many other Africans, enjoys story-telling and the use of occasion to entertain with songs, sermonize, and teach morals. In this dispensation, many Yorùbá novels have been written and published to do exactly what the traditional Yorùbá do with story-telling under the moonlight. Fáṣèkẹ́ (1998) further asserts that among all the Yorùbá novel writers, Fágúnwà gained prominence because of his impressive use of aesthetic expressions in Yorùbá language. This informs the choice of his works in this paper as valid representations of the

Yorùbá cultural values worthy of cross-cultural studies in literature. The paper exposes how the literary works of Fágúnwà portray the superstructure of the aboriginal Yorùbá family system and its value for the modern day civic education. The study is couched in philosophical theories and pragmatic values. These enhanced the exposition of the author's dexterity in projecting the Yorùbá worldviews in his novels to propagate and promote Yorùbá's ideas and ideals beyond the mere levels of themes, styles, characterization, and symbolism.

2. Research methodology

In order to produce an in dept analysis of Fágúnwà's works, his most accessible five novels, namely: *Ògbójú Ode nínú Igbó Irúnmale* (1938), *Igbó Olódumarè* (1949), *Ìrèké Oníbùdó* (1949), *Ìrìnkèrindò nínú Igbó Elégbèje* (1954) and *Àdùtú Olódumarè* (1961) were used as primary source of data while library and archival materials were employed as secondary data to compliment the primary texts. The data were subjected to critical contextual analyses.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature is replete with basic branches of knowledge that are indispensable to explication of the literary works from philosophical perspective. This motivated the adoption of philosophical concept of worldview as the framework of this study. In the first place, Phillips and Brown (2010) describe worldview as "an explanation and interpretation of the world and an application of this view to life." Kuyper (in Naugle, 2017) sees worldview as a "life-system," rooted in a fundamental principle from which was derived a whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions about reality." This implies

that worldview refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it. These are the overruling life principles that underlie all works of Fagunwa which make them different from other literary works that are accessible through the conventional principles of literary criticism.

The worldviews applicable to Fágúnwà's novels include concepts drawn from the classical/western philosophical backgrounds. Baker (1947) avers that, Thales cosmology construes the earth as a flat disc floating on circumambient waters, it is made clear that without the universal, it is not possible to get knowledge but separating the universal from the individual is the cause of the objection that arise with regard to the Platonic theory of Ideas. Fágúnwà employed notions from these philosophical schools in portraying the Yorùbá worldviews. Also, reflected in his works are the ideas drawn from the Western and Eastern Worldviews.

The Eastern traditional worldview looks at the universe as an organism, which means 'all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process' (Cheon, 2010). The correlate between the Yorùbá worldview and the general philosophical concepts were also drawn from this Eastern perspective of worldview in Fágúnwà's novels.

Also worthy of mention is the fact that the novels devote ample portion to exploration of the African Worldview as a basis for establishing the place of the aboriginal Yorùbá in the context of African traditional worldview. The African worldview as portrayed by Fágúnwà contrast with the Western worldviews in many respects. For instance, in the Western philosophies, worldviews are systematized and labelled, distinguishing the animate from the inanimate, the physical from the metaphysical, the sacred from the secular, the natural from the supernatural. On the contrary, in Africa

worldview these are meaningless; hence, the supernatural powers can influence the natural order. So the African interprets the world in theological terms rather than from scientific perspectives. This, however, does not mean that the African has no interest whatsoever in natural causes. The influence of the supernatural in nature is relative to the complexity of the phenomenon.

Also worthy of note is the aboriginal Yorùbá Philosophy which plays very crucial roles in the family structures and the general sociological construct of the race. Like every other race across the world, the Yorùbá people have rich philosophical ideas and worldviews that influence their cultural practices and social relationship. These have very close semblance with some of the worldviews of other African societies. One striking feature of the Yorùbá philosophy is that it is mainly a narrative philosophy, explicating and pointing to the knowledge of the causes and the natures of things affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe and its wellness. The Yorùbá people regale in hundreds of philosophical aphorisms and lore. They believe that any lore that widens people's horizons and presents pabulum for thought is the beginning of philosophy (Oladipo 2007). In a nutshell, philosophical ideas among the Yorùbá race are robustly represented in Fágúnwà's novels.

Also important to this paper is the paradigm drawn between literature and philosophy in Fágúnwà's novels. Duran (2007, 1) makes it clear that literature can perform; can apprise us of the existence of issues, and can shape our attitudes in area such as morality and aesthetics. Philosophy, especially any sort of philosophy not in the analytic tradition can itself be analysed in terms of its rhetorical content and style; and can at least in some instances be analysed along the same lines as literature. Philosophy can be thought of as a kind of writing, and since we already think of literature in such terms, it is much easier to begin an analysis of their intersection. However, contemporary work has

been done on the boundary of philosophy and literature precisely because so many philosophers have thought that literature has a great deal to offer on a conceptual level. It speaks to moral and even epistemological concerns.

4. Data analyses

This paper explores the idyllic Yorùbá family setting as depicted in Fágúnwà's novels. It expounds the superstructure of kinship ties and social institutions among the Yorùbá people with a particular emphasis on the family institution in aboriginal Yorùbá society. The data elicited from Fágúnwà's novels were analyzed to explicate the Yorùbá family structure, its underlying worldviews, values and flaws as depicted in the five novels accessed in the study. Texts demonstrating the different realities are presented in the analyses below.

4. 1. Clips on Yorùbá family structure

In Fágúnwà's novels issues about families are given prominent considerations. Instances of this are found in family of Àkàrà Oògùn in *Ògbójú* (p. 3), family of Ifẹ̀pàdé and Ifẹ̀pínà in *Ìrèké* (p. 85), family of Olówó-ayé in *Igbó*, family of Òmùgòdimèjì in *Ìrìnkèrindò* (p. 49) and the family of Òbiri-aye in *Àdìtù* (p. 30) and so on. Fágúnwà explores in depth the Yorùbá kinship styles in the novels. At the beginning of his story in *Ògbójú*, Àkàrà Oògùn expresses Mbiti and Fádípè's presentation of Yorùbá clan in the novel. Àkàrà Oògùn reveals:

Ní àkókò ìgbà kan, ọmọ mẹ́ sàń án nì bàbá mí bí, èmí
sì nì àgbà gbogbo wọń, ìyàwó mẹ́ rìn nì ó ní, ìyá à mí
sì nì ìyáálé (p. 3).

At a time, my father had nine children. I was the eldest of them all. My father had four wives with my mother as the eldest wife.

The above clips indicate that the typical Yorùbá family values polygamy and large number of children. This is depicted in the tone of delight with which the character, Àkàrà Oògùn announces the structure of the family to which he belongs. Fádípẹ (1970) states that whether a family is polygamous (no case of polyandry has been reported in Yorùbá land) or monogamous, wife, husband and children are found under one roof. But, the tentacles of the family institution transcend the nuclear family, especially in the African context. It embraces kith and kin- the uncle, the aunt, the niece, the cousin, the nephew, the grandfather, the grandmother and so on. The man as the destined head of the family plays dual roles of both husband and the father. His opinion is held as the final verdict as regards any matter in the home. Despite this prerogative some fathers are committed to their families whereas some are not (Adélékè, 1986). As can be seen from the excerpts above, the entire family members are proud of their family structure irrespective of their economic conditions.

4.2. Yorùbá Kinship

Fádípẹ (1970, 118) submits that to the Yorùbá, the larger the circle of one's kin, the greater one's social and political importance, and the more economically and socially important one is, the larger is his/her circle of kin. Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the ethnic group (Yorùbá) and is even extended to animals, plants and non-living objects through the 'totemic' system. It is glaring that almost all the concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kinship system. The fact that kinship terms relating to the husband are applied to members of his paternal and maternal kin groups alike

is a strong argument against regarding those who are so united by a common name as descendants of a common ancestor which is given a totemic name. The Yorùbá kinship terminology in Fágúnwà's novels occurs in Ògbójú where Àkàrà Oògùn's wife (a sage) describes the sage who kills Lámorin as Tènbèlèkun who's brother's name is Bilísì who lives in her mother's kindred at Ògbunilè (Dungeon) who marries her own sister and has a child named Ìdàrúdàpò (confusion). That this superstructure of family extension is generally welcomed in the aboriginal Yorùbá society is manifest in Fágúnwà's work as expressed by Àkàrà Oògùn's wife in the following threads:

A! Okùnrin tí iwọ́ rí ni, Tènbèlèkun ni orúkọ rẹ́ n jẹ, ègbón rẹ́ sì ni ẹni tí n jẹ Bilísì, ẹni tí ilé rẹ́ n bẹ́ ni ògbun àìníṣàlẹ́, níbi tí wọ́n gbé tí bí iyá à mí. Tènbèlèkun ni o fẹ́ àbúrò mí, wọ́n sì bí ọmọkùnrin kan, orúkọ ẹni tí n jẹ Ìdàrúdàpò. (p. 44).

Ha! the man you saw is called Tènbèlèkun, his brother is called Bilisi whose house is at the Bottomless pit where my mother was born. Tènbèlèkun married my younger sister, they gave birth to a boy called confusion (Ìdàrúdàpò).

The excerpt above is an exposure of Yorùbá chain of kinship. Fágúnwà extensively exposes Yorùbá worldview about family cord in his novels. The view of the Yorùbá about ẹbí (family) is that the cord of 'ẹbí' (the filial cord binding extended family members together) must not break because they are close related. Yorùbá believe in oneness, so they say: *Karin ká pọ́, yíyẹ ni i yẹni.* (the more united we are, the more the merrier). They also believe in mutual understanding and togetherness; that is why their women see nothing wrong in living together as co-wives. This worldview is however contravened in the story presented by Fágúnwà about Àkàrà Oògùn's mother in Ògbójú and Ifẹ́pínà in Ìrèké. These two women do not care about the breaking of the family cord. This implies that just as it is also possible in other cultures, there are

sometimes deviant cases which cannot be used as a parameter to predict the ideal social norm.

Also depicted in the excerpt above is the recognition of hierarchy in the family set up. Àkàrà Oògùn is presented as the eldest son, followed by his step brothers/sisters and his mother being the first wife is ìyáálé (senior among the co-wives) in Fádípè's (1970) classifications. Also, Àkàrà Oògùn's father who marries these women as a member of the clan (*Okọ* husband). This phenomenon is described by a common saying among the Yorùbá that: "*Iyèkan alábaun kò ju méta lọ*." That is, (the family does not grow beyond this level). This Yorùbá worldview about family is extensively encapsulated in Fágúnwà's novels. In short, as already mentioned in this study, Fágúnwà encapsulates in his novels kinship distributions among the Yorùbá that even transcend one described in Fádípè's (1970) classifications. These are:

Ọbàkan – (step brothers and sisters), *Abùrò Ìyá* – mother's younger one's – male / female, *àbùrò bàbá* – mother's younger one's it could be male/female, *ẹgbọn Ìyá* – mother's senior's – male/female, *ẹgbọn bàbá* – father's senior's – male/female, *Ọmọ abùrò Ìyá* – mother's junior's child, male/female, *Ọmọ àbùrò bàbá* – father's junior's child – male/female, *Ọmọ ẹgbọn Ìyá* – mother's senior's child – male/female, *Ọmọ ẹgbọn bàbá* – father's senior child – male/female, *Ọmọ, ọmọ ẹgbọn bàbá* – father's senior children child, *Ọmọ, ọmọ Ẹgbọn Ìyá* – mother's senior children child, *Ọmọ, ọmọ àbùrò bàbá* – father's younger children's child, *Ọmọ, ọmọ abùrò ìyá* – mother's younger children's child, *Ọmọ ọbàkan* – children of the step brothers and sisters.

As a matter of fact, the exposition of the family structure artistically portrayed by Fágúnwà in the novels studied are glaringly the typical social link that sustains unity and strong social ties among the Yoruba race even across the artificial political boundaries introduced

at the advent of the British rule in west African countries. Up till today, this family ties keeps the Yoruba race in Diaspora connected to their kiths and kin beyond religious prejudices and geographical limitations.

4.3. Co-wife rivalry in the family system

Mbiti (1969, 142) submits that polygamy raises the social status of the family concerned. It is instilled in the minds of Africans that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. However, there exist some social problems that are synonymous with the practice of polygamy. It would therefore be wrong to pretend that everything runs smoothly in polygamous families. Quarrels, jealousy and physical combat among the wives and among the children are not infrequent. Any husband who neglects some wives and favors others, especially the new wife, is considered as being cruel. This situation in a polygamous home is what Fágúnwà authenticates in *Ògbójú* where he exposes the rivalry acts between Àkàrà Oògùn's mother and other wives in the home. The Yorùbá traditional lore also acknowledges this social consequence of polygamy in the contents of an Ifá oracle known as '*òyèkú méjì*' (Wándé Abimbólá 1968, 34) which goes thus:

*...Okan soṣo póró lobìnrin dùn mọ lówọ ọkọ, '
 Bí wọn bá dì méjì, wọn a dòjòwú.,
 Bí wọn bá dì mèta, wọn a dẹta n túlẹ.,
 Bí wọn bá dì mèrin, wọn a dì iwọ lo rín mǐ nǐ mo rín ọ,
 Bí wọn bá dì márùn un, wọn a dì lágbájá nǐ ó run ọkọ
 wa tán lóhùn
 Susuusu.,
 Bí wọn bá dì méfà, wọn a òkà,
 Bí wọn bá dì méje, wọn a dàjé,
 Bí wọn bá dì méjọ, wọn a dì òyá aláṭàrí bànbà ló tì kó
 irú èyí sẹ ọkọ
 wa lówọ,*

*Bí wọn bá di mèsàn án, wọn a di iyáálé wa ò nişé kan,
kò lábò kan,
bó bá ti jì, aşo oko wa ní í má a sán kiri,
Bí wọn bá di mēwàá, wọn a di ilé ni oko o wa jókòò,
ni wọn n wá oko o wa wá...*

The most pleasant marriage is one man, one wife.
If they are two, they become jealous,
If they are three, they become traitor,
If they are four, there would be controversies within the family,
If they are five, they become suspicious of one another,
If they are six, they become wicked,
If they are seven, they become witch(es),
If they are eight, the first wife become victim of bad
luck to their husband,
If they are nine, they become morkers of one another,
If they are ten, they become analyst of one another.
(Our translation)

This indicates that rivalry among co-wives is usually a complex issue among the Yorùbá, women. It is delicate and very dangerous to deer. The experiences in Yorùbá, polygamous homes is authencifies in the above Ifá excerpt.

4.4. Querrel between co-wives

Disagreement occurs between Àkàrà Oogùn's mother who is one of the wives, so, the case is taken to Àkàrà Oògùn's father but Àkàrà Oogùn's mother feels slighted the way the matter was judged by her husband. Being a witch (Àjẹ) she decides to kill three wives and eight out of nine children of Àkàrà Oògùn's father. Àkàrà Oògùn says:

*Ó şe ní ojò kan, iyá mi àti okan nínú àwọn iyàwó wònyí
jà, wọn sì kó ejò náà lọsí ọdọ bàbá mi, ọ̀un sì dá iyá
mi lẹ̀bì, èyí tí ó mú kí iyá mi bínú púpò, ó sì pinnu láti
gbẹ̀san. Ó bèrẹ̀ sí hu iwà àjẹ rẹ̀ tó bẹ̀ẹ̀ tí ó fi pa omọ méjọ
nínú àwọn omọ bàbá mi, ó sì pa iyàwó méta kí ọdún náà
tó parí, ó wá jẹ̀ pé ó kú èmi nìkan gégé bí omọ, ó sì ku
ọ̀un nìkan gégé bí iyàwó (p.3).*

One day, my mother had a quarrel with one of the wives, the matter was referred to my father who found my mother guilty, this made my mother greatly angry and vowed to retaliate. Being a witch, she killed eight of my siblings, she also killed three wives before the end of that year. This left only me as a child and only her as a wife.

Such is the wickedness and havoc that co-wives mete out to one another. Hence, the Yorùbá, saying ‘*Òrìṣà jẹ n pé méjì obìnrin ò dénú,*’ (no woman would embrace rivalry). Jealousy could occur among Yorùbá, women to the extent that the wife involves cares not for any consequences that rivalry acts could cause her husband, such is the case of Àkàrà Oogùn’s mother. She decides to kill her husband’s children despite the fact that her own three children are inclusive and this is a kind of situation Mbiti (1969) confirms of a polygamous home among the Africans which the Yorùbá, belong. But, does the incident in the above excerpt enough for Àkàrà Oògùn’s mother injustice if considered philosophically? The Yorùbá, frown at injustice, and, that no one should take law into his/her hands. Fágúnwà reveals the havoc in which rivalry can bring into Yorùbá, polygamy family system which propel the Yorùbá wise saying ‘*Ríro lóro, là n pè lórogún, kíkán lókan, là n pè lóbàkan.*’ (‘hostility is the hatchery of co-wives’ rivalry, tense atmosphere breeds hatred among half siblings’). At times, hatred and fighting amidst rivals also affects the children in Yorùbá family system. Fágúnwà’s standpoint on polygamy reflects the facts that despite its general acceptability, some Yorùbá, still take exception to polygamy.

5. Conclusion

The lifestyle of the Yorùbá race is encapsulated by Fágúnwà in his novels. The novels of Fágúnwà tell more about the aboriginal Yorùbá people in relation to the social realities that are peculiar to

them. His works provide ample information that are illustrative enough to get the non-Yorùbá audience informed about who the Yorùbá people are in terms of their acumen in the general social administration. The sample analysis of the Yorùbá family life cycle in this paper reveals extensively, the world of the Yorùbá and their philosophical insight.

The analyses presented in this paper brought to the fore a great deal of realities of Yorùbá worldview on *ẹbí* system (family) and also a rich exploration of Yorùbá worldview. Conclusively, The Yorùbá worldview on family which is one of the hallmarks of Fágúnwà's novels is desirable and relevant to all human races irrespective of the epoch, country or culture. The positive effects of this worldview on the society in Fágúnwà's days still remain among the Yorùbá communities till this present age; and should still be distilled and projected in our modern day civic education.

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